(*February* 16, 1916.)

Marat.

By C. Edward Wallis, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., L.D.S.

It is somewhat strange that no English-speaking "medical writer" has ever given any special attention to the scientific career of Marat, the notorious French revolutionary, and yet he was both a scientist and a London medical practitioner before he entered upon the bloodthirsty career for which I suppose he will be ever remembered. Like certain other great Frenchmen, he was of Italian origin, though born in the Swiss Canton of Neuchâtel in 1743. His real name was Jean Paul Mara, the "t" having been added later to give his name a more French appearance.

The father of Marat seems to have been a gentleman of many occupations, for at one time he was a designer, at another a chemist, and, later, a teacher of languages; there is, however, no reason to doubt that his parentage was, socially, satisfactory, though his mother, Madame Mara, a Swiss by birth, seems to have been described by certain neighbours as possessed of a diabolical tongue, and as a notorious liar, a slanderer, and a renegade wife.

Marat, in one of his publications, known as *Le Journal de la République française*, has left us a remarkable account of his youth, in which he says that he was born with an impressionable nature, a fiery imagination, a heart open to every lofty passion and, above all, to the love of Fame which devoured his mind. Marat also declares that his *moral sense* was already developed at the age of 8, for even then he could not bear to see ill-treatment practised upon another, that "the sight of cruelty filled him with indignation," and that "injustice made his blood boil like a personal outrage."

At the age of 18 Marat left the paternal roof and went to study medicine in Toulouse and Bordeaux, after which, for fourteen years, he seems to have divided his time between England, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, and Paris, where he settled for a time in 1751. About the year 1765 he again returned to London, when he commenced practice as a doctor in Church Street, Soho, and remained for ten or twelve years, during which time he seems to have been a welcome guest in the

best literary, scientific, and artistic circles. While in London he wrote in English a large number of scientific and philosophic books and pamphlets, of which the first was "An Essay on the Human Soul," published in 1772. Another of his works, this time in French, was entitled "The Discoveries of M. Marat on Fire, Electricity, and Light," which received the approbation and honourable mention of the French Academy of Sciences. The last purely scientific work of Marat was published in 1788 on the subject of "Light," in which appeared, among others, essays on the rainbow and the colour of the sky at sunrise and sunset.

With regard to the medical career of Marat it is uncertain whether he ever took a medical degree in France, but somehow or other he certainly received the degree of Doctor of Medicine from the University of St. Andrews in 1775, that is, some ten years after he had commenced practice in Church Street, Soho. I will not attempt to read the diploma, but will merely quote therefrom the special paragraph relating to Marat himself, as follows :—

> "Since Jean Paul Marat, a very distinguished master in arts, has given all his attention to medicine for several years, and has acquired a great skill in all branches of the science: With the approbation of numerous doctors in medicine, there has been conferred upon him the supreme grade of doctor in medicine."

This degree was equivalent to an honorary one, and, as was the custom of the time, was conferred on the recommendation of two medical men known to the Senate—namely, Dr. Hugh James and Dr. William Buchan.

There is some reason for thinking that Marat had obtained other medical degrees, since, on his appointment in 1777 as Physician to the Body Guard of the Count d'Artois, he is described officially as "Doctor in Medicine" of several English faculties. Marat held this post for nine years, at the end of which he resigned in 1786.

While practising in Church Street Marat published two medical "tracts," as they are called, the first of which is dedicated to the "Worshipful Company of Surgeons," in London, and dated November, 1775, while the second, entitled "A Singular Disease of the Eyes," is dedicated to "The Royal Society." The first of the two "tracts" referred to is entitled "An Essay on Gleets," while the second tract is entitled "An Enquiry into the Nature, Cause, and Cure of a Singular Disease of the Eyes," both by Jean Paul Marat, M.D.

In his essay on "Gleets" Marat strongly condemns the use of

common bougies, as he called them, on account of their irritating properties, and follows by describing what he calls a proper way to cure "gleets," by means of special bougies of white wax, followed by the use of diachylon in gum, after which an injection of a weak solution of sal ammoniac was prescribed four times daily. Marat concludes this essay of 21 pages by observing that "there is no Gleet incurable, nay there is none which cannot easily and speedily be cured if properly treated."

The affection of the eyes described in Marat's second tract he attributes to the use of certain mercurial preparations, and mentions it as having been hitherto confounded with "gutta-serena," which was also known in those days as "black cataract," and was the form of blindness from which the poet Milton suffered.

Marat's first political work was entitled "The Chains of Slavery," and was written and published in London in 1774. In it his revolutionary ideas of social reform began to show themselves very clearly. His first writing with a direct bearing upon the Revolution appeared in 1788, in the form of a pamphlet called "Offrande à la Patrie"; it dealt specially with the miseries of the people as being due to the iniquities of "Finance Ministers."

As Marat's political career alone would fill a volume, I shall not attempt to deal further with it, but pass at once to the man himself and the diseases from which he himself was a sufferer.

Carlyle describes him as a "large-headed, smoke-bleared, dwarfish individual with blue lips, and his temperament as acrid and corrosive as the spirit of sloes and copperas." A contemporary describes him as being only 5 ft. high, with bow legs, and a very large head and aquiline nose. It would appear that Marat had two personalities: (1) The one, that of a scientist and philosopher, which died in 1789, the year of the fall of the Bastille; (2) the other, that of a fanatical journalist, pamphleteer and demagogue.

Marat throughout his life had always endeavoured to attract public attention, and when opposed by others became morbidly introspective. He was despised and jeered at in academic circles, and believed himself persecuted and libelled by everyone. Cabanés declares that Marat was hypochondriacal and exaggerated greatly his own infirmities, and that he poured out his bile in pamphlets and his bad temper in sentences of death. Cabanés suggests that it was the bodily infirmities that warped Marat's frame of mind, and that the perpetual irritation and itching of the pruritus from which he suffered caused his temperament

to become sanguinary and ferocious. Marat suffered from insomnia and constant headaches: that is why he is often represented with a cloth on his head, this cloth being soaked in vinegar. Cabanés believes that Marat's skin affection was of the nature of eczema, affecting largely his scrotum and perineum, and that the exacerbations of his pruritus coincided with the violence of his phrases in *L'Ami du Peuple* and the other revolutionary journals to which he was the chief contributor. The only way by which Marat could get relief from his pruritus was by constantly sitting in the well-known shoe-shaped bath, which was made of beaten copper, and across which a board was put on which Marat used to write his articles for *L'Ami du Peuple*, &c. The curious shape of the bath seems to have arisen from the necessity of economizing water owing to the difficulty and expense of carrying it upstairs and from a distance. I am, however, indebted to Dr. Graham Little for the suggestion that Marat's affection was probably dermatitis herpetiformis, on the ground that the irritation and pain from which he suffered were alleviated by sitting in a bath of water, whereas eczema itself would have been much aggravated by contact with water.

As is known to all, it was while he was sitting in this bath that Charlotte Corday stabbed him in the chest on July 13, 1793. Charlotte Corday, who was guillotined for this crime, is said to have died saying: "*One* man have I slain to save 100,000."

Members of the Odontological Section of this Society will be interested to know that the man who rendered first aid to Marat was a dentist named Michon-Delafondée, who practised in the same house; Delafondée bandaged up the wound, had Marat put on his bed, but soon found that he was beyond human aid.

Marat was almost deified after his assassination, a magnificent funeral was accorded him, and he was buried in the Panthéon, the anniversary of his death being kept as a fête-day to the end of the Revolution. Later, however, the memorials of Marat were thrown down and broken in pieces, his remains being removed from the Panthéon and thrown into the common burial ground.

Such, then, is the tragic story of probably the most notorious doctor of medicine our profession has ever known.

Dr. GRAHAM LITTLE: I am much interested in Mr. Wallis's admirable paper. It is, of course, notoriously difficult to make a diagnosis of diseases from descriptions of them afforded by poor observers and at a remote period. But the symptoms so graphically detailed by Mr. Wallis, the long duration

of the skin affection from which Marat suffered, and more particularly the means sought to give relief, point to a diagnosis of dermatitis herpetiformis, a popular French treatment of which to this day is immersion in more or less continuous baths. This treatment is unlikely to have afforded relief in eczema, which, moreover, is rarely so irritating as this eruption seems to have been. And the collateral symptoms of great nervous excitement which are so characteristic of dermatitis herpetiformis seem to have been present to a marked degree in Marat's case, and indeed the agony of this disease is such as almost to excuse any degree of ferocity in a patient under the paroxysm of this terrible affection.

(*February* 16, 1916.)

A Sixteenth-Century Oculist.

By Percy Dunn, F.R.C.S.

Andreas Laurentius was a French anatomist of distinction; but he was also Physician to King Henry IV of France, and Professor of Physic in the University of Montpellier. At the end of the sixteenth century he published a book under the title of "A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight," incorporating with it three other treatises, respectively upon Melancholike Diseases, upon Rheumes, and upon Old Age. This curious medley of subjects requires some explanation. Among his patients was a duchess, or, as he describes her, "The noble Lady, Madame, Duchess of Uzez and Countess of Tonnera." This noble patroness suffered from various complaints. She was blind in the right eye from cataract; she suffered from touches of the windy melancholy; she had "petty distillations and fluxes of humours which fell upon her eyes, teeth, arms and legs," whatever that may mean, and finally she was not young. Becoming interested in her diverse pathological developments, she commanded her physician to set out in writing his views and comments regarding the features of her maladies. He conformed to her request by writing this book. In his dedicatory epistle, however, it is worthy of note to observe that he disclaims any maladroit insinuation that she could possibly be old, such as the treatise on old age might seem to convey. "I am persuaded," he says, "madame, that no man can call you old in any respect if it were not that you are past fifty, and that custom in accounts hath designed the first degree of old age to this number."